



CITY OF MANCHESTER

Joyce Craig
Mayor

Thank you.

Thank you, Mike, for your introduction and for all the work you and the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce do for our city. You and your members have been incredibly gracious and supportive since I took office. Thank you all for your continued commitment to making Manchester a place where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

Thank you all for being here this morning. Finally, thank you to the staff of Derryfield for taking good care of us this morning.

I've been in office a short time — just 12 weeks. In that time, we've worked to fulfill promises we made to the people of Manchester while beginning to implement long-term solutions to our greatest challenges. I'm proud of what we've already accomplished, and I'm confident that working together we will position Manchester for a better future.

Over the last three months, we've worked to help build a culture of collaboration and openness. On the day of my inauguration, I met with city department heads and let them know I'll always be open to their ideas. As we enter a difficult budget season, I've asked them to bring forward any and every idea — new or old — that can help us improve city services while making smarter choices with our tax dollars.

In addition to changing the tone at City Hall, I promised to change the way we do business. I believe the mayor of Manchester should lead from our community not from behind her desk. Earlier this month, I announced my first schedule of community office hours. We've already held two of these meetings where we've heard firsthand about the ideas and issues residents are facing. There are many more events scheduled in wards across our city, including on nights and weekends.

I've accompanied our police officers on ride-alongs and an early morning drug raid, watched our firefighters as they battled a three-alarm fire and saved someone who had overdosed, and rode along with a plow driver during one of the seemingly endless snow storms we've experienced this winter. I've seen firsthand the outstanding work of our hardworking and dedicated employees and I want to thank them for the work they do.

I've visited businesses across Manchester to discuss how City Hall can help promote job growth and business expansion. I've talked to executives at Pillpack, volunteers at the YWCA and doctors at CMC and Elliot Hospital. I visited Eversource's operations center to learn how they prepare for and respond to storms. While touring ARMI, Hoyle Tanner, and Velcro USA, I saw firsthand the commitment our business community has to our city and to our future. I want you—Manchester's business leaders—to know City Hall is here to help. I want to work with you to ensure that you can start a business here, grow a business here, and succeed here.

I've worked to make sure the voices of Manchester are heard in Concord and in Washington. In January, we brought together our state representatives, State Senators and city department heads to discuss legislation that would affect Manchester. I've worked with the Governor, our federal delegation and testified at the State House on matters that directly impact our city. And just this week, I spoke directly to the President about federal funding for the opioid epidemic.

The desire to improve our city is palpable and the sense of togetherness is inspiring. For many, Manchester is home. For others, it's where we make a living. We all care about this city.

And we all hurt when we see our friends, colleagues and neighbors suffering from substance use disorder. We share the same heartbreak when we learn of another life lost to the drug epidemic. Across the state—in a time of great need—addiction treatment centers are closing due to lack of funding.

In Manchester, the primary treatment provider for Safe Station, Serenity Place, closed in January. It came as a shock to our community and our state, and since then, others have followed.

These losses forced us to evaluate the effectiveness of funding and programs.

Today, the city is working in harmony with a number of organizations to help strengthen and improve services provided by our Safe Station program.

Families in Transition, led by Maureen Beauregard, picked up the pieces and outlined a sustainable path forward. The Farnum Center, led by Cheryl Wilkie, stepped up to provide a stabilization unit for Safe Station, on top of existing recovery and support services. Granite Pathways is providing screenings to help us identify the services people need — something that wasn't happening before. The Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester is utilizing its mobile crisis unit to help people across the city — a service that wasn't being widely utilized before. Manchester Healthcare for the Homeless is providing physicals free of charge — a program that wasn't a part of this network before.

And the additional support provided by Makin' it Happen, Granite United Way, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, Catholic Medical Center, Elliot Health Systems and Dartmouth-Hitchcock is critical to our success.

Our community-centric model is already producing results. When I became Mayor on January 2nd, it took around 2-3 weeks to get Safe Station patients into treatment. Now, we can get people into treatment in 2-3 days.

To ensure lasting success, I've formed the Mayor's Council on Addiction, Treatment and Recovery. Together, we will develop long-term, evidence-based, sustainable solutions for those suffering from substance use disorder.

None of the progress we've made addressing the opioid epidemic would be possible without the outstanding work of our police, fire and health departments.

Our police department continues to employ modern approaches to fighting crime, utilizing predictive policing methods, hot spot patrols, and strategically deploying resources. Their efforts have led to a three-year downward trend in the city's crime rate.

While reducing crime, our police department is also focusing on improving our community by aiding children in crisis. Chief Willard and the Manchester Police department have created the first ever Adverse Childhood Experience Response Team (ACERT), where children who are exposed to trauma in the home get services in real time. Comprised of a police officer, a child advocate and a counselor, the response team acts as a safe place for children to receive help.

Since the beginning of the opioid epidemic, the Manchester Fire Department has been on the front lines. Our firefighters have taken on massive responsibility regarding the opioid epidemic in a time of great need. Their dedication to Safe Station is truly admirable.

I think it's important for us all to recognize the mental and emotional toll this work takes on our first responders. I want to thank Chief Goonan and Chief Willard and all of our first responders who risk their lives every day to keep our community safe.

In addition to police and fire, our Public Health Department, led by Tim Soucy, plays an essential role in improving our community. Through the Neighborhood Health Improvement Strategy (NHIS), they're helping to provide educational opportunities for residents of all ages, connecting them to physical and mental health services, social services, education, parent workshops, health screenings, and community events. We're optimistic we've seen short term successes that are contributing to the reduction in childhood poverty.

Rightfully, our Health Department is nationally recognized for its work, and I'm thankful they are a leading partner in our efforts to improve the public health of Manchester.

A healthy and thriving community requires a strong public school system. My husband and I both attended Manchester public schools, and it's where we chose to send our three children. Two have graduated from Central, and our youngest is an 8th grader at Hillside.

There has never been a more pivotal time to impact the direction of Manchester's public schools than right now. To improve our school district, there's a lot we need to do. Our focus must be on improving student achievement in all grades. We need a district-wide literacy program and resources to provide intervention when a student is in need of extra help. We need a standard math program and options for professional development in the elementary and middle schools. We need curriculum alignment across all grade levels so there's a seamless transition from elementary school to middle school to high school. We need to work together to close the gap so children are prepared when they start kindergarten. We need to strengthen our schools to be competitive and innovative by making sure we have the best educational opportunities available.

In the coming weeks, Dr. Vargas and I will announce a unique opportunity that promises to have a positive, long-term effect on our district. This community-centric effort will help us realize the full potential of our schools and our students, and it will set us on a realistic course for strengthening our public schools.

This will allow us to build upon what we already do well. Collectively our high schools offer over 17 advanced placement classes. In our district, high school students have the opportunity to earn college credits and pursue opportunities for internships and real-world learning. And we are looking at ways to expand Manchester School of Technology due to increasing student interest.

Memorial High School's FIRST Robotics Team 238 won The Granite State District Robotics Competition, and they're currently ranked 4th in New England. West Junior Julia Robitaille was named the Division II Champion in the 3,000-meter run, the 600-meter run and is the New England Champion in the 1-mile run. Her twin sister Corinne Robitaille was named Division II champion in the 300-meter dash. Central's Roric Cunningham was accepted as a cellist to Youth Orchestra of the United States. And Memorial senior Madison Elgner is one of only six students in New Hampshire to be awarded a National Gold Key in the Scholastic Art Awards competition.

I know the people in this room know Manchester has amazing students and understand the incredible value of education and workforce development. Which is why our city will soon look to you to help us implement the changes necessary to strengthen our school district.

Manchester's businesses are thriving – a testament to the work you've all done in our community. I know the ideas that will drive our economic future will not all come from City Hall, but from listening to you, the business community.

That is why today, I'm honored to announce that I will establish the Manchester Business Council to create a plan for short and long term economic growth. Co-chaired by Mike Skelton, this council will bring together city officials, municipal staff and business leaders to create a more business-friendly environment that will aid business attraction and retention and expand the municipal tax base. We will address issues like the need for expanded parking options in our downtown and how to support statewide efforts that will benefit Manchester.

In addition, our Planning Board will soon undergo an effort to solicit input from community leaders, businesses, cultural communities, residents and more to update the City Master Plan. Your participation is critical to a successful process, which will result in a document that combines the rich history of our great city with a vision of its future. Manchester is only as successful as the support we receive and give throughout our community. And it is our businesses that will help tremendously in leading that charge.

While we confront our challenges, we cannot allow our city to be defined by our struggles.

Moving forward, we must support bold and transformative projects. I will continue to advocate for expanded commuter rail. We will soon issue an RFQ for renewable energy services in our city. I remain committed to making our underutilized riverwalk a destination. And we will celebrate our city's rich history and diversity through public art and community spaces.

While we've made great strides in the last 78 days, much work remains ahead. I am heartened by the outpouring of support by the people in this room and beyond who want to give their time, talent and resources to improve our city.

I am optimistic about the state of our city.

I am honored to stand before you today, and look forward to helping create positive change for Manchester.

Thank you.